

**Testimony for Education Committee
On S.B. 1138, *An Act Concerning the Strengthening of
School Bullying Laws***

**By Lisa Tregoning, Program Manager
The Governor's Partnership to Protect Connecticut's Workforce
DBA The Governor's Prevention Partnership
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Good afternoon, Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann, Senator Fonfara, Representative McCrory, Senator Giuliano, Representative Boucher and distinguished members of the Education Committee. My name is Lisa Tregoning and I am the program manager for safe schools and bullying prevention services of The Governor's Prevention Partnership. For over 20 years, our non-profit organization has provided resources and services so that young people in our state can grow up free from substance abuse, underage drinking, violence, and bullying and be able to take their place in our future workforce.

I am here to offer my views on some specific aspects of Senate Bill No. 1138, *An Act Concerning the Strengthening of School Bullying Laws* based on my first-hand observations with schools that I have worked with over the last year and a half and also based on what I know of best practices for bullying prevention.

Background

The Partnership's long-time work in Connecticut's schools with administrators, staff, and students in the area of creating positive school climate and bullying prevention has given us first-hand knowledge of how the effects of bullying behavior can hinder the academic, social and emotional development of our children. In 2009, the most recent statistic we

have for Connecticut, just under one third of high-school students report having been bullied in the past year. If we were to include cyberbullying, the number would be much greater.

Based on a body of research, we know that safe, respectful learning environments result in positive student outcomes, including reduced dropout rates, increased academic achievement and reduced juvenile and adult crime. The Governor's Prevention Partnership believes that, by using existing resources and leveraging state, federal and private/corporate support, four key recommendations can be realized in Connecticut. These include:

- (1) Establishment of common school-climate improvement standards
- (2) Coordination of statewide data collection
- (3) High-quality and widely available professional development opportunities for school staff
- (4) Development of a strong statewide network to coordinate training and ensure science-based programs.

We applaud the fact that this bill is about creating positive climates in school buildings through a comprehensive approach, which will result in reduced bullying incidents.

In the bill as raised, we especially support and urge the following:

1. Time sensitive reporting and investigation by school staff as described in Section 1.
2. Development of a statewide survey and use of data-driven decision-making to increase the likelihood of affecting long-term change and having a positive impact on school climate and bullying, as described

in Section 3.

3. A trained school team in place, as described in Section 9, to address bullying and school climate and to serve as the vehicle for positive school-level change. With administrator participation, the team collects and analyzes school data, assesses gaps and needs regarding practices and programs, manages reporting and investigation of bullying incidents, plans school-wide events, oversees staff training and manages their school's strategic plan for climate improvement.
4. Mandatory, in-service bullying prevention training for all teaching staff, administrators and pupil personnel including paraprofessionals, as described in Section 6.

I also want to support and add some clarification regarding Section 4, in which the Department of Education will establish a statewide safe school environment resource network. It has been our experience that some schools and school districts are doing quite well with creating a comprehensive approach to bullying prevention and have found and are using effective programs and trainings on their own. There are other school districts, however, that don't know where to turn for reliable information. So, as we see it, there are several benefits to establishing such a statewide network which include:

- Schools would have one place to turn to get information on effective training opportunities and resource information rather than having the burden of searching for resources individually.
- The network would ensure that trainers and training programs are high quality, evidence-based, well-coordinated and

available in all areas of the state.

- Once data is received from the school surveys, the network can analyze trends and prepare for meeting future training needs of schools.
- The network can create partnerships between state departments, local schools districts and nonprofit and community organizations in order to be well-prepared for federal or private grant opportunities. In addition, the network can accept private donations on behalf of the state's schools and also assist schools with seeking funding from their local foundations and businesses.
- Finally, the network can channel national resources, such as the National School Climate Standards, and best practices from other states.

The Governor's Prevention Partnership has over 10 years of experience in establishing and maintaining statewide networks. We have the Connecticut Mentoring Partnership, which coordinates training and resources for over 150 mentoring programs in the state, and performs all of the functions that I just outlined for mentoring programs. We host the Safe Schools Advisory Committee and would be glad to serve as a resource for the safe school environment resource network. We believe that schools are better served by coordinating resources and ensuring science-based practices.

Thank you.